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Excerpt from a radio talk by  
W. R. M. Wharton, chief of the  
Eastern District, Food and Drug  
Administration, Department of  
Agriculture, delivered through  
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## HOW TO READ THE LABEL

### Canners' Bill

I have some interesting news for you today. The Food and Drug Administration is making great progress in standardizing canned fruits and vegetables. Perhaps you do not know what this means--- so let me tell you that the 71st United States Congress passed, and the President on July 8, 1930, approved, an amendment, commonly known as the Mapes Bill or the Canners' Bill, to the Federal food and drugs act. This enactment is intended to promote honesty and fair dealing in the interest of the consumer. The amendment authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to determine, establish and promulgate reasonable standards of quality, condition and/or fill of container for each class of canned foods except canned milk and those meat products of cattle, sheep, swine or goats which are subject to the Federal meat inspection act. This does not mean standards are authorized for grades, varieties, or species of a generic product, but only for generic products themselves. The amendment further provides authority for the Secretary of Agriculture to prescribe and promulgate a form of statement which must appear in a plain and conspicuous manner on each package or label of canned foods which falls below the standards promulgated, which statement shall indicate that such canned food falls below such standards. The enactment of this amendment to the food and drugs act is an epoch-making event in your interest. It is an important step forward in the interest of informative labeling. It signifies that the consumer will be furnished on the label a means of determining whether any particular item of canned food is above or below an established standard of excellence. I told you that this amendment is known as the Canners' Bill. This is because the law was passed at the behest and urgency of the American canners themselves. The American canning industry is not only solidly supporting the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act, but desires further to see in effect legal requirements for informative branding of a still more effective kind.

Great progress has been made in the formation of the standards for the

various food products. Standards for several canned products will be promulgated shortly, and when next season's pack of canned foods comes on the market, you will find on labels of products not meeting the established standards a statement indicating that such products are below the United States standard. The legend to be used to indicate the fact has not been decided upon, but the expression "Below United States Standard" will likely form a part of it. Isn't this good news? Isn't it good news that you are to be supplied a method of determining whether canned foods are of standard quality or not? Now what does it actually mean to you? It means if any lot of canned goods is not properly prepared or does not meet the standards established for quality, then such products must be marked to show that they are below the United States Standard. Heretofore, the label reader has not had any label means of determining whether any particular canned food is of standard quality or substandard, tender or tough, naturally flavored or off in flavor, properly filled or improperly filled, naturally colored, or off in color, and the like. The official standards will require normal color, acceptable degree of tenderness, normal flavor, etc., and any products not meeting any of these conditions will be required to be labeled with a statement showing them to be below the United States Standard. This will not require manufacturers to make label statements of the various degrees of quality, not will it even require labels to state that the products contained are of standard quality when such is the case, but it will require labels on substandard products to plainly designate them as below United States Standard. When products are labeled to show that they are below the United States Standard, this will not mean that they are unfit for food. It will mean that they are inferior to standard products and, therefore, should sell at a cheaper price. Isn't this a splendid piece of news for you, Mr. and Mrs. Label Reader? You may begin to look for the declaration on the products covered after next season's pack of canned goods comes on the market. If you find a statement to the effect that the product is sub-standard, you will know that it is below the established standard. If you do not find such a statement, you will know that the product meets the standard. It is possible that manufacturers themselves will elect to make affirmative and positive statements of relative quality on products which are superior to the standard. I can visualize developments from this beginning which will present to the consumers a fuller opportunity to become increasingly more discriminating in making their purchases. This amendment to the law will not cause any let-up in the enforcement of the food and drugs act. Unfit products will continue to be barred from commerce and denied the right to be used.

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